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ABSTRACT

This document describes how a local district can prepare for the implementation of the community education concept. It proposes a planning system that utilizes community involvement in assessment, goal setting, and program design. Specific implementation strategies are presented. (Author/MLF)

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PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Community education may well have had its origin with Plato. For him, the educated citizen was both a means and an end. His idealist philosophy was based on the educated citizen; his education was based on citizens transmitting knowledge and skills to others.

Somehow over the centuries, education has narrowed to ages 5 through 16 and has been confined to school buildings. Many have tried to enlarge this popular conception of education with varying success. The Flint experience has certainly achieved much in this regard. By bringing the community into the schools and, in turn, extending the schools to the people, America has certainly taken a step toward the Plato ideal.

The crucial issue at this point is how to export the Flint experience to the many communities throughout the United States. Success of such efforts depends not so much on the value of that to be exported, but rather, upon the conditions into which the export is to be made. In reality, only careful planning by the local community can insure successful implementation.

Local educational planning must also deal with means and ends. If community education is the end to be reached, so too must community education be the means to reach that end. If the schools are to serve the community (in the broadest sense), so too must the schools involve the community in setting goals, designing programs, and conducting these programs.

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Much educational planning today has entailed new jargon and complicated statistics. In spite of their value, such technical planning tends to reduce its usefulness except by a few trained professionals. However, planning need not be so complicated, as shown below.

It is convenient and useful to consider planning in terms of a system, that is, a set of inter-related steps that are sequential and unifying. Operationally, and in terms of community education, a planning system must be:

a. Cyclical--new programs must be based on goals, sound design, and effective implementation, and eventually subjected to an assessment.

b. Annual and keyed to budget development--monies need to be officially allocated to carry out the plans.

c. Flexible--components of systme must allow for involvement by the community.

The flow chart below (Chart I) represents the first two items. Each phase is dependent on the previous; each phase follows the typical budget development process. As new programs are implemented, they become subject to the process of assessment.

Item three represents a most important consideration. Hence, our discussion will focus in more detail on various alternatives which could be utilized in any one, or any combination, of the stages of the planning cycle, or system.

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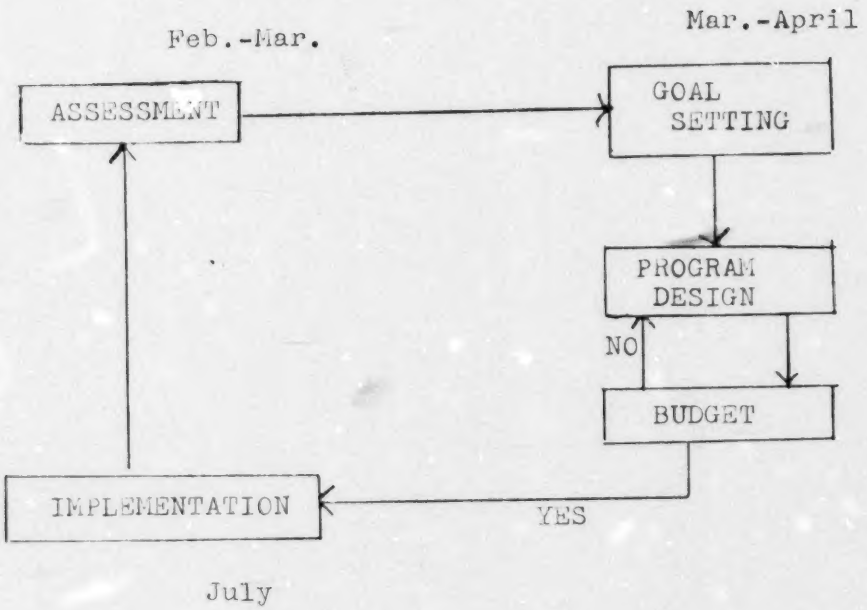

Chart I: Planning System

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ASSESSMENT:

The underlying question here is--Where are we now? Appropriately, an assessment means collecting data on enrollment, types of services offered, costs, staff levels, and effectiveness of current educational programs. Furthermore, an assessment calls for some form of analysis of that data. In terms of community education, a two-fold opportunity exists: a study of the community and a study by the community.

Consider these strategies:

1. The assessment should collect and analyze data on how the schools and other agencies (public and private) are serving the community (pre-school to aged).
2. Some measure of quality should be presented in terms of how well programs serve community, i.e., feedback from clients in form of survey.
3. The assessment itself should be carried out with members of the community, possibly as members of an assessment development committee, survey teams, or resource people.
4. The assessment should include input from the community at large, particularly in terms of program effectiveness; e.g., survey of community opinion.

GOAL SETTING:

Where do we want to be next year? In five years? Often used as a public relation device, goal writing efforts generally suffer credi-

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bility of the effort is greatly enhanced. Consider the following:

1. Involve the community in a variety of efforts--ward or neighborhood meetings, large city-wide work sessions, public hearings, newspaper write-in campaigns--to gain support and concensus.
2. Utilize goal setting processes involving citizen involvement; e.g., Phi Delta Kappan's Educational Goals and Objectives, a Model Program for Community and Professional Involvement.
3. Bring the community into goal/objective writing programs at the building level, charging the principal with this leadership effort.

PROGRAM DESIGN:

The question now becomes--How do we meet these goals? Typically, new programs come out of the professional ranks--teachers, counselors, and administrators. At times, board of education members initiate a program idea. There has been little citizen, taxpayer, or community person program development.

Part of the difficulty is that school practice normally does not allow for community involvement at this stage. Many administrators fear to bring "ousiders" into this effort. Much of this fear is the result of inexperience in dealing with lay people. Others have fears based on past experiences that were ill planned or carelessly conducted.

Hence, I would offer a caveat: Do not utilize any of the strategies frivolously for public relations. Furthermore, do not allow aspiration

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levels reach the point where the community believes every suggestion will be funded. Indeed, the community needs to understand that there are many good ideas, but limited resources.

Strategies here include:

1. Establishment of program design teams composed of citizens, staff, and students which, through the dynamics of the group, may generate programs reflective of the total community's needs and desires (goals).
2. Issue to the community at large an RFP--Request for Proposals. Identify goals publicly and ask anyone or group who has an idea (as to how to meet the goal) to submit a brief proposal, giving both program and budget recommendations.
3. Expand the activities of the community/parent advisory and planning committees normally associated with federally funded programs and projects, e.g., Title I, ESEA, or Headstart.

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT:

Turning to an equally important area is the question: How much will the new programs cost? Somewhere early in the planning process, back at the goal setting stage, all available monies should be identified which could be utilized for new programs (or re-design of old programs). Doing so provides some budgetary guidelines needed during the program development stages.

Budgets are often considered to be a singular concern for a hired

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accountant, too technical and complicated for lay people (and educators). In fact, the actual budget is a small part of the budgetary process. Gaining acceptance of the budget is a far greater problem, one which the school business people have the greatest difficulty.

Consider the following in terms of community service to the schools:

1. Citizens who suggest program should develop some budget requirements and show how program will meet needs.
2. Community groups can be recipients of local budget allocations to conduct a program effort in the community.
3. Community groups and individuals can participate in the presentation of the budget to the general public and urge its acceptance.
4. The community, individually or in groups, could identify and seek outside funding from private, industrial, or foundation sources to encourage local support of the total educational program.

IMPLEMENTATION:

What efforts now need to be taken in order to put the designed program into effect? Here the considerations turn to hiring or transferring personnel, scheduling, management, and evaluation. Another concern is that of coordinating a new program with those already in operation.

Many of the concerns are dependent on the age of the clients or students; i.e., pre-K, adult, and general community. But regardless of program orientation, an effective implementation provides the field test needed to determine the value in terms of the community. Poor management could well des-

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troy the most innovative of programs.

Hence, each of the following should be considered:

1. A community advisory/planning/steering committee or council to assist the administration of the new program.
2. Utilization of community people as staff, resources, and evaluators; e.g., instructional aides, outreach counselors, and community liasons.
3. A program review providing constant feedback on the impact of the program's goals, objectives, and activities.

The planning phases and strategies outlined above represent generally an inter-mixing of what is now going on with what could be going on in the schools. These strategies also represent a move toward enlarging the concept of education as it now exists today.

Implementing each of the above, or perhaps all of the above, may not achieve Plato's ideal society of educated men. However, their utilization, I believe, will help establish a relationship between community and education that will be more than just syntactic.